



1131 E. Center St. · P.O. Box 310 · Ithaca, MI 48847-0310

Phone: (989) 875-5101  
Fax: (989) 875-2858

*Mid-Michigan's Network*

Comments before the House Committee on energy and Technology  
Regarding House Bill 5237  
Presented by Dave Childs  
Director, Mid-Michigan's Network for  
Educational Telecommunications.

My name is Dave Childs. I am the Executive Director of Mid-Michigan's Network for Educational Telecommunications – a consortium of ten school districts in Gratiot, Montcalm, Isabella and Clinton counties. MMNet was formed in 1998 to address the bandwidth needs of these predominantly rural districts. Since its inception other entities have connected to the network in the absence of alternatives. MMNet currently provides circuits to three public libraries, a community hospital, two community colleges, five other school districts and one for-profit Internet access provider that requested a circuit in order to provide service to another school district in Montcalm county.

Over the past seven years the use of the network has evolved as a result of changes in the market. For example, initially, in addition to Internet access and video services, MMNet provided *long distance* voice services to its ten members. In 2003 however, because of the drop in per- minute long distance rates, we started moving each district off the network to for-profit long distance providers. As of four months ago, we no longer provide any telephone service.

Some *Internet* users have also migrated to for-profit providers. A charter school and a county building in Gratiot county are examples of former users that found other for-profit alternatives for Internet access and no longer use MMNet. Finally, in 2000 we provided just under 2000 *dial-up* accounts in areas that had no alternative for dial-up Internet access. Over the past 4 years that number has dropped to fewer than 650 as cable modems, satellite and Digital Subscriber Lines or DSL have slowly moved into some areas.

You can see from these examples, that far from being a competitor to phone companies, cable companies and satellite providers the MTA has nurtured a symbiotic relationship in which schools have acted as a market softener for for-profit providers. The provisions of the MTA have made it possible to expose hundreds of thousands of students, teachers, administrators and parents to advanced technologies. These same users are the customers of tomorrow. With all the challenges we have before us as a State, we can't afford to take a step backward by changing the educational provisions of the MTA.

At this point, MMNet is focused predominantly on aggregating bandwidth to meet the growing demand from our schools. For example, we face an increasing demand for high-bandwidth video for Instructional Television Courses. MMNet is currently offering

language courses such as Japanese, Spanish, German, French and other offerings such as Astronomy, sign language and debate. We offer Virtual Field Trips and Video Conferencing for professional development. We are also implementing video streaming to replace the old method of distributing videotapes by mail or delivery van. These enhanced services improve quality and lower costs and would simply be too expensive for smaller districts to offer on their own.

Overall, the network has helped insure that these rural districts have had access to the same bandwidth resources that have been available in urban areas for many years. From the perspective of the Superintendents who pioneered the network, the educational provisions of the current MTA were extremely well crafted in the 1991 and 1995 rewrites and have served Michigan's schools very well. But more important, as schools face new challenges in preparing kids for a high tech, globally competitive environment, the flexibility provided by the current Act in Section 307 is essential to meeting their needs in the future.